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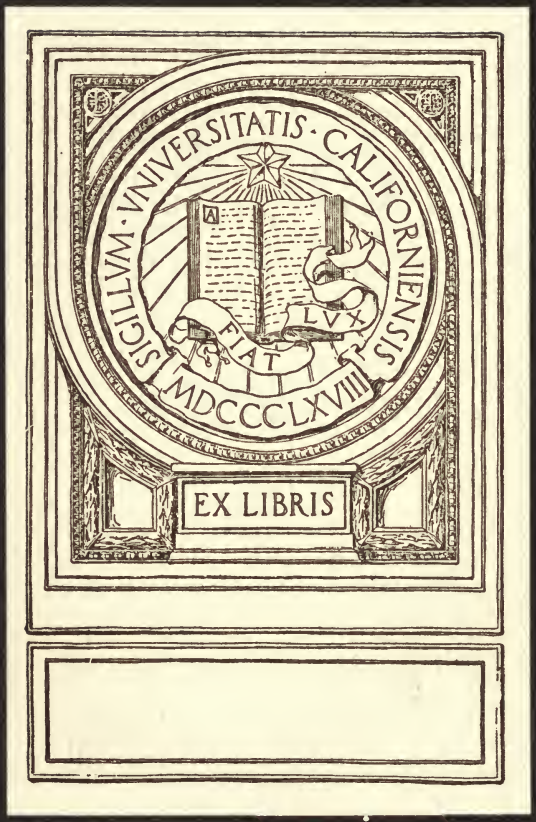
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WHAT THE FRENCH HAVE DONE IN AMERICA

FROM THE DISCOVERY TO THE OPENING OF THE ISTHMUS OF PANAMA

BY

CH. DE LA RONCIÈRE

HISTORIAN OF THE FRENCH NAVY

PARIS

TYPOGRAPHIE PLON-NOURRIT ET Cie

8, RUE GARANCIÈRE — 6e

1915

SAMVEL DE CHAMPLAIN
Fondateur de Quebec Capitale du Pays de Canada
1608

THE FIRST FRENCHMAN WHO PROPOSED THE CUTTING OF THE PANAMA CANAL (1600)

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WHAT THE FRENCH HAVE DONE IN AMERICA

France gave the New World its name. In 1507 at Saint-Dié, a Cosmography was published by Martin Waldseemüller and Mathias Ringmann. Impressed with the narratives of Americ Vespuci of the New World, our men of learning did not hesitate to attribute to him the honour of the discovery and to inscribe on their maps *America*. Here is its act of baptism : « *Non video cur quis jure vitet ab Americo inventore, sagacis ingenii viro, Amerigen quasi Americi terram sive Americam dicendam.* »

How long is it since we first went to the New World? It is impossible to determine, for our first transatlantic voyages remain enveloped in mystery. But what suggestive perspectives certain documents recently brought to light open up to the imagination!

It is still a matter of question as to whether the Bretons were not in possession of the « secret of Newfoundland » before the discoveries of Christopher Colombus. At Paimpol, the ever-celebrated town of the Newfoundland fishers, the Monks declared the levy of the tithe on the cod fishery « in as much in the Iceland, Newfoundland as elsewhere *since sixty years* » ; their declaration is of the 14th December

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1514, which would ascribe the beginning of the cod Fishery to the year 1454.

In Brazil, were we not before Pedralvarez Cabral, who discovered it in 1500? Yes, if we trust an authentic document, the relation of a voyage of the ship « *l'Espoir* » of Honfleur in 1503. It bears textually that « *d'empuis aucunes années* », that is to say several years before 1503, « Dieppois, Malouinois and other Normans and Bretons » went to this part of the Indies which has since been called Brazil.

The New World was still only known to us by its productions, its fauna and its flora, cod-fish, wood from Brazil, monkeys and parrots, when a Norman corsair Jean Fleury brought home in 1523 veritable treasures in works of art, masks in mosaic of fine stones, gold and silver vessels upon which were engraved figures of animals, idols in precious metals, mantles in feathers so artistically wrought that silk and gold embroidered stuffs could hardly be compared to them. These objects comprised the furniture of the Palace of Guatimozin, the trophies of the conquest of Mexico that our corsair had intercepted just at the moment when Cortès was sending them away to Spain. A portion only of the Spanish booty arrived at its destination (1).

(1) References. — See the work of M. Ch. de la Roncière, *Histoire de la marine française*, 2e édition, Paris, Plon, 1906-1913. 4 vol. in-8° (Honoured twice unanimously with the grand prix Gobert by the Institute).

I

THE FRENCH SEEK AN OPENING IN THE AMERICAN CONTINENT IN ORDER TO GO INTO THE PACIFIC

Without there being any relation as between cause and effect, the very same year that the corsaire Fleury came back to Normandy with the rich spoils of Aztecs, an expedition was being prepared for the continent of America. It was organised by a syndicate of silk traders and bankers of Lyons, the Gadagnes, the Le Buatiers, the de Martignys, etc., who were seeking the shortest route to China. Not having succeeded in passing through the boreal seas of Europe, the head of the Expedition, a Florentin refugee in France named Verrazzano, reached North America of which he skirted the Coast in 1524. To the actual territory of the United States, he gave the name of *Francisca* or *Nova Gallia*. This system of naming half-Norman, half-Florentine which New France or Francisca received, betrays the native land as well as the land of adoption of the discoverer. « Diepa, Anaflor (Honfleur), Longavilla, Anguilème, Normanvilla, Vendomo... » succeeded each other with « San Miniato, La Certosa, l'Annunziata, l'Orto de Rucelay... » in memory of the Florentine marvels.

Two years later, Verrazzano went off again under the

patronage of the Admiral of France. In the whole of the American Continent which spread out before him, he did not give up hope of finding a fissure by which he could penetrate into the Western Ocean. He died at the task. But the idea was set going and so completely that a chart of sea ports of 1536 represents an interoceanic strait under the title of « el Viazo de Fransa ». The strait, in the *Green Globe* which is preserved in the National Library of Paris, is situated on the site of the Panama Canal.

The Isthmus of Panama, however, was not accessible to us, so rigorous were the Spanish prohibitions to approach it. In 1572, one of our most qualified pilots, author of an atlas which is the jewel of our Cartography, succeeded in exploring it, but under contraband and by main force. Guillaume Le Testu, of Havre, by a curious coincidence, met in the Isthmus one of the most celebrated English navigators, Francis Drake, who had come to take possession of Nombre de Dios. Both laid in wait for the « *recoes* » who were bringing from the coast the treasures from Peru. By the death of Le Testu in the attack of the Spanish escort, Drake was enabled to collect such a booty that every French and English sailor had for his share 60 000 crowns.

Twenty-four years later, Drake came to die upon the scene of his exploits. An atlas of views taken on board the *Defiance*, which he commanded, represents the outline of the Isthmus of Panama and the exact spot where the body of the first English navigator who went round the world, was buried at sea on the 28th of january 1596.

It is near Puerto-Bello in view of Buena-Vista, six leagues

at sea, that he reposes (1). This atlas preserved in the National Library of Paris, has so much the more interest for us as the great English navigator, charmed no doubt by the talent of Guillaume Le Testu and Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, took with him on his expedition French painters. Of his voyage round the world which took him to California, there is preserved in an English collection a unique manuscript (2) for the ethnography of the New World : work of one of these artists, two hundred « drawings, painted in natural colours representing trees, plants, fruits, birds which are found in the Indies as also the mode of living of the Indians, hunting, fishing, etc. each accompanied with historical explanations ».

One of these « painters » visited the Isthmus of Panama on board a spanish vessel which he had succeeded in stealing upon. And, for the first time, in 1600, the idea was put forth by a Frenchman that this thin tongue of Earth could be pierced. The Saintongean Samuel de Champlain wrote in these very terms : « In this spot of Panama, is gathered together, all the gold and silver which comes from Peru. It is freighted on a little river which flows from the mountains and which descends to Portovello, which is four leagues from Panama. On can judge that, *if these four leagues of land were cut,* one could come from the south sea to the sea this side. »

A few years before, one of our most sagacious statesman, Philippe du Plessis-Mornay, convinced that the occupation

(1) *Un atlas inconnu de la dernière expédition de Drake* (*Vues prises de son bord*), par Ch. de la Roncière. Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1909, in-8°.

(2) Sold the 15th November 1911 at London with the collection Huth.

of Isthmus and straits would assure the domination of the world, counselled Henry III to take possession of the Isthmus of Panama. Thanks to the help of the outlaws black slaves and of those indomitable Indians whose descendants still come down from their resting places in the mountains to scourge the waves which brought the conquistadors, four thousand Frenchmen and eight men-of-war would have sufficed to have given us the key to the two Americas. Was there any chance of this counsel being followed? The history of the French colonisation will tell us (1).

(1) Ch. de la Roncière, *le Secret de la reine et la succession de Portugal.* Paris, Plon, 1908, in-8°.

II

FRENCH COLONISATION

In spite of the Bull of Demarcation of Pope Alexander VI, according to which the Spaniards and Portugueses took it upon themselves to prohibit other nations access to the New World, France did not cease to attempt the creation of colonial settlements. In 1534, Jacques Cartier, of Saint-Malo, commenced a series of explorations in view of discovering « Countries where it was said great quantities of gold might be found ». If he brought back from his travels a geographical error, the idea that Canada formed « an extremity of Asia on the Western side », the Malouin pilot had very perfectly discerned the « suitableness » of a country easy to cultivate. In september 1538, he submitted to King François Ier a complete programme of colonisation which required, as the first condition, the sending out of 276 men belonging to all trades. A Viceroy was appointed; and the handsome Atlas executed for king Henry II shows us the landing on the banks of the St. Lawrence, at the head of his men-at-arms, of the viceroy Jean-François de La Rocque de Roberval.

Unfortunately, this rugged breton sailor was not a dealer in precious stones. Sent to investigate the land of gold,

Cartier thought he had brought back « leaves of fine gold, as thick as a finger nail, and the most beautiful diamonds that it was possible for man to see ». But all that glitters is not gold, and *false as a diamond from Canada* from that moment became proverbial. The result was discredit of New France, nay even of the exodus in 1544 of all our Colonists.

In 1555, the breton vice-admiral Durand de Villegagnon established himself in the Bay of Janeiro, on an island which to-day still bears his name. He was the viceroy of *Antarctic France*. Absolute liberty of conscience, parliamentary form of government with a council of ten, right of pardon reserved to the viceroy, seemed to assure the vitality of the Colony. But an attack of the Portuguese five years later reduced it to nothing, in the same manner as another of their agressions had ruined our settlements near Pernambouc in 1531.

Evicted from Brazil, our sailors hoped to find in Francisca formerly explored by Verrazzano a better field for colonisation. In 1562, captain Jean Ribault and captain René de Laudonnière with their huguenots disembarked there as in the Promised Land. Singing the psalms of David, they settled on the banks of a river which they baptised « the Jordan », while to the neighbouring rivers they gave the names of the rivers of France : « the Seine, the Somme, the Loire, the Charente, the Gironde. » Three years after, they fell under the stroke of the Spaniards, singing the miserere, « Domine, memento mei ». South of San-Agustin, the place of carnage is still called the lagoon of the massacre, « Matanzas ».

RIVERS OF FLORIDA, CHARENTE, GARONNE, GIRONDE

Miniature by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues executed in America in 1564.

To these aspirations of France towards the New World, a Queen thought of giving a direction and an development until then unknown, as if she had foreseen the great part which the American Continent in future would be called upon to play one day. It is only quite recently that *the secret of the Queen* has been revealed. At the same time that she sent as viceroy to Newfoundland her page Troïlus du Mesgouez, marquis de la Roche-Helgomarch, Catherine de Médicis gave to her cousin Philippe Strozzi letters of mysterious provisions, establishing him « viceroy, without it being necessary to specify more plainly, in any particular spot whither the said sire was making his way ». It is ascertained to-day that Strozzi had the secret order to take possession of Brazil. It was there that he was going when he was killed on the 26th of July 1582, at the naval battle of Azores.

The impulsion given by Catherine de Medicis was followed by numerous military reconnoitring parties resulting in the creation of little colonies. In the island of Maranhão, North of Brazil, François de Razilly founded *Equinoxial France*, the capital of which San-Luis still exists, although Equinoxial France did not live more than four years; it was conquered in 1616 by the Portuguese, as Antarctic France had been a century before.

At this moment, the famous work of Raleigh, *The Discovery of the large, rich and beautiful Empire of Guyane,* turned the activity of our explorers towards a mysterious Eldorado, where the last Inca, fleeing before Pizarro was supposed to have buried the treasure of his ancestors. From this fable, originated in 1602 the only one of our

colonies which has remained firmly established in South America, La Guyane.

It served as a base for the French colonisation of the Antilles, which were said to be « the outskirts of India ». Founded in 1626 with a capital of 9 000 dollars, the Company of St. Christophe desired to populate the still unoccupied Islands of the Antilles between the 11th and 18th degree of north latitude. And its efforts were crowned with such success, that our possessions soon counted fourteen islands divided up into three sections, with St. Christophe, Guadeloupe and Martinique for numbered chief towns, and there was even at Bahama the barony De Caen. After three centuries, the French flag continues to float over several of these islands, at the entrance of the gulf of Mexico and of the Panama canal, time not yet having ruined the work of the contemporaries of cardinal de Richelieu, Roissey, Poincy, Dyel du Parquet.

The respect of the liberty of others, one of those qualities which distinguish only the leading nations, had won over to us many aborigenal tribes. No matter from whence they came, the natives who came in France received a most affectionate welcome : such as the Indian from the south, Essomericq, who came in 1504 with Paulmier de Gonneville so initiate himself in the mysteries of civilization, was so charmed with it that he founded a family in Normandy; again, the sons of a Huron chief became the inseparable companions of Jacques Cartier.

The 1st of october 1550, when king Henry II with great pomp visited Rouen, scenes of Brazilian life were enacted before him. Savages whose faces were « streaked » with

MARANHÃO AND ANTARCTIC FRANCE IN BRASIL

Map drawn by Jacques de Vaux (1613).

emeralds, ran after monkeys and sagoins, parrots flew wildly about; meanwhile, to the deafening noise of a horn made of the bony shell of an armadillo, to the sound of a dry gourd filled with stones, the Tabajars, in war costume, buckler of tapir skin on the arm, a disc of ostrich feathers round their waist, threw themselves on the peaceful Tupinambas, who were swinging in hammocks at the door of their reed-cane huts.

Half a century later, in 1613, Tupinambas, Tabajars, Tapuias and Long-Haired of Para, specimens of the divers Indian tribes, came to swear allegiance to the king in a solemn audience at the Louvre, where one of them pronounced a harangue in tupi. To each of his new vassels, Louis XIII handed the necklace of Saint-Louis, after having had them sumptously attired in crimson garments and castor hats whith white feathers.

They were received as distinguished guests. In Canada they treated us as allies.

In the regions of New France, in Canada, in Acadia and in Newfoundland, our progress had not ceased since the day when the page of Catherine de Medicis had for the second time hoisted our flag there. One of our Basques, Martin de Hoyarsabal published in 1579 the first pilot-guide book of Newfoundland, where all information necessary for insular coasting were to be found. Chauvin, Lieutenant of Troïlus Du Mesgouez, founded in 1600 the station of *Tadoussac* on the St. Lawrence. Five years later, *Port Royal* sprang up, which to day is Annapolis, this was the act of the viceroy Du Gua de Monts.

Finally, in 1608, Samuel de Champlain, the father of

New France, cast anchor in the narrowest part of the St. Lawrence, where a few oxidized cannonballs, a wall in ruins testified to the stay there of Jacques Cartier. A warehouse on the banks of the water, three main buildings surrounded with galleries, a little fortress with a deep moat all around, such was the capital of New France, *Quebec*. The fine maps of Jean-Baptiste Franquelin show us what at the end of the century it had become when thousands of immigrants, Normands, Poitevins, Saintongeans had reinforced the primitive colony (1).

(1) F.-X. Garneau, *Histoire du Canada*. 5e édition revue et annotée par Hector Garneau. Préface de M. G. Hanotaux. Paris, Alcan, 1913, in-8° : Bibliothèque France-Amérique.

III

THE FRENCH SEEK AN INTEROCEANIC PASSAGE THROUGH NEW FRANCE

After his expedition through the Isthmus of Panama, Champlain was haunted by the idea that there existed across the American Continent an interoceanic passage. By the St. Lawrence, the lakes and a river which flowed into the Gulf of California, he believed he would find a way of access to the Pacific. He had made the court of France share his conviction to such an extent that he received from Condé, in 1612, the affectionate exhortation to seek across New France « an easy road to the kingdom of China ». Of this route the Dieppois Guérard anticipated the existence so confidently as to inscribe it on his maps in 1634.

To the missionaries who had accompanied him along the banks of the St. Lawrence, Champlain bequeathed his firm conviction. As the torch which was passed from hand to hand by the runners of antiquity, the missionaries transmitted the faith in the existence of an interior sea « from which one could be reached Japan and China ». Their accounts of 1640 and 1660 prove this. One of them, Father Marquette accompanied on the voyage Louis Jolliet, he undertook to discover a mysterious river of which the

Indians spoke. It was the Mississipi, « the Colbert river ». Jolliet descended it in a canoe made of bark to Arkansas where he got a very clear idea that the river fell into the Gulf of Mexico. On the map which he addressed to comte de Frontenac, governor of New France, « one sees, said he, the communication of the river St. Lawrence with the Frontenac, Erie, Huron and Illinois lakes, at the end of which (the Illinois lake) one can join by a portage of a thousand paces the Divine river, which flows into the Colbert river and empties itself into the gulf of Mexico ». Robert Cavelier de la Salle followed up the exploration, reached the mouth of the river the 9th april 1682 and taking possession in the name of the King of the immense territories which he had traversed, he christened them *Louisiana*.

In 1718, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville gave a little capital to Louisiana, *New-Orleans*. It consisted of a hundred wooden houses. Up the river, the Canadian La Clede laid the foundation of a town of which the population is today well on towards a million souls; *St. Louis* was in 1764 merely a settlement from whence the trappers scoured the solitude of the west in pursuit of bison, bear and beaver.

However, our Canadian settlers did not lose sight of the Western Sea. « It is my intention », wrote Greyselon Du Lhut to the minister Seignelay in 1680, « to push on to the sea on the West-North-West side which is believed to be the Golden Sea. The natives informed the three Frenchmen I sent to discover it that a 20 day's journey would bring them to the Great Lake, whose water is not

good to drink, because it is salt ». The mistake, for such it was, was a very natural one. The sea in question was not the ocean, but the Great Salt Lake, situated behind the barrier of the Rocky Mountains. Later in 1717, the sieur Hubert, in a memoir on Louisiana, makes mention of a navigable river, « a branch of the Missouri it is thought, which flows into the Western Sea. Canadians brought to these parts would soon succeed in discovering it and by their settlement which would establish trade with China and Japan, the way would be short. The matter appears of sufficient importance to deserve looking into ». The Marquis de Vaudreuil was so fully persuaded of this, that the same year he proposed to establish three stage posts in order to further the discovery of the Western Sea.

A century later, the true inheritor of Champlain's idea was a Canadian of the Three Rivers, Pierre Gauthier de Varennes de La Vérendrye. While Governor of a port on the north of lake Superior, he was persuaded in 1728, by the accounts of the Indians, that it was easy to reach the great sea of the West. Duly commissioned by the Viceroy de Beauharnois, he began the works of approach, by building a system of small forts from the south of Saskatchewan to the Missouri, fort St. Charles on lake Des Bois, fort Maurepas on Lake Winnipeg, fort La Reine on the Assiniboine. From there, his son François, known as the chevalier de La Vérendrye, set out on April 29th 1740, with a small band of explorers to seek the Western Ocean. On March 30th 1743, he was on the Missouri on the site now occupied by Fort-Pierre. It was the end of his journey of exploration; stopped by the barrier of the

Rocky Mountains and seeing no where else « any likelihood » of penetrating beyond into the Spanish territory of New Mexico, he retraced his steps to Fort La Reine. He had previously placed on an eminence, near the fort of the Indians of the tribe of the Little Cherry, a plate of lead; what the fate of this leaden plate was we shall see later.

After La Vérendrye, the mission of discovering the sea of the West fell to Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, who ordered the chevalier Boucher de Niverville to follow the Saskatchewan river up towards its source. And one may say that the Discovery of the interoceanic passage was our chief preoccupation.

In 1763, the French Dominion received its deathblow on the plains of Abraham and fell to pieces. The mighty empire we had spent a century and a half in creating, and which stretched across rivers, lakes and streams from the mouth of the Saint Lawrence to the delta of the Mississipi was no more. For a short time, in 1800, Louisiana came back into French possession, but three years later, France gave back to the United States that vast basin of the Mississipi, all the Far West to the Pacific ocean. At the streets corners in New-Orleans, may still be seen such names as Bienville, Chartres, Bourgogne, Condé... redolent of the old country, as much as in Quebec and Montreal.

IV

THE TRACES OF FRENCH DISCOVERIES

Are there any traces left of our explorers in the different parts of the American continent through which they passed? Yes, for they left on their way definite signs of their passing, wooden crosses, stone landmarks and leaden plates. Such an one was that gigantic wooden cross erected by the sailors of the *Espoir* on Easter Day 1504. They had engraved on it the names of the Pope, of Louis XII, of admiral de Graville and the crew, whilst the date was inscribed in the form of a chronogram in a latin couplet. It was also by means of large wooden crosses that Jacques Cartier marked our taking over of Canada. One erected in 1534 in the bay of Gaspé bore the inscription : « VIVE LE ROY DE FRANCE. » On another placed on the banks of the Saint Lawrence, in 1536, was written : « FRANCISCUS PRIMUS, DEI GRATIA FRANCORUM REX, REGNAT. » The « padrons » that Ribault and Laudonnière left in Florida were of a substance sufficing to withstand the ravages of time. They were upright stones covered with fleurs de lis. In some of these charming designs executed in 1564 in the New world, where one can see portrayed to the life the customs of the Indians, now sticking arrows in the war-

path, now concealed in elk skins on the watch for wild animals at the watering place, the Dieppois Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues shows us the importance of these stones escutcheoned with the royal coat of arms. The Indians in adoration before these stones, as though before idols, offered to them the first fruits of the earth, in the presence of our sailors gathered respectfully around the symbol of the Mother-Country.

But in the rapid excursion across the continent, these stones would have been « impedimenta ». Our people carried metal plates by way of « padrons » engraved with the arms of France. We have preserved the official report of the taking over of Louisiana, when Robert Cavelier de La Salle reached the spot where the Mississipi flows into the gulf of Mexico. Not content with erecting a column carved with fleur de lis and a cross, he buried at the foot of a tree a leaden plate on which can be read : « LUDOVICUS MAGNUS REGNAT NONO APRILIS 1682. » On the other side was written : « ROBERTUS CAVELIER, CUM DOMINO DE TONTI, LEGATO, R. P. ZENOBIO MEMBRE, RECOLLECTO, ET VIGINTI GALLIS, PRIMUS HOC FLUMEN, INDE AB ILINEORUM PAGO ENAVIGAVIT, EJUSQUE OSTIUM FECIT PERVIUM NONO APRILIS 1682. »

One of these inscriptions left by our discoverers has recently been brought to light by the merest chance. Whilst playing on the banks of the Missouri some children dug up at Fort-Pierre in South-Dakota a thin plate of lead bearing the arms of Louis XV. The Chevalier François de La Vérendrye had placed it there the 30th of september 1743 in the course of his long journey in search of the Pacific Ocean. On the back of the inscription bearing

THE INDIANS OF FLORIDA IN ADORATION BEFORE THE FRENCH COAT OF ARMS (1564)

Miniature executed in Florida in 1564 by the Dieppois Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues.

in beautiful capital letters the names of the King, the Viceroy de Beauharnois and Pierre Gauthier de la Vérendrye his father, he had traced with the point of a knife his own name and that of his brave companions (1).

In order to find similar remains, « the map of a journey taken in Belle Rivière in New France in 1749 », can furnish useful indications : « the marks of the places where leaden plates were buried are noted on it ».

But our bold pioneers did not only leave material traces in the New World. Their descendants are still there, millions of them in Canada, hundreds of thousands in the United States, bearing witness to French culture, and so attractive was this culture that the Indians themselves remembered it with affection.

A tradition still extant among the Huron Wyandotts, recorded by one of them named Dooyentate, relates that a band of Delaware Indians who had settled on the banks of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, were ordered to watch for the return of Jacques Cartier. One day those who were on the look out saw some large birds with brown breasts and white wings cleave the waters of the gulf. From their sides came forth thunder. These were the boats of the man from St. Malo, whom they awated in order to welcome (2).

In 1827, six red Indians landed at Havre from the Mis-

(1) This discovery has formed the subject of a clever and interesting study by the Hon. Charles E. de Land, *The Verendrye Explorations and Discoveries*, in the *South-Dakota historical collections*, t. VII. Pierre (South Dakota), 1914, in-8°.

(2) Peter Dooyentate Clarke, *Origin and traditional history of the Wyandotts and sketches of other Indian Tribes of North-America*. Toronto, 1870, in-8°, p. 4.

sissipi. They were a deputation from the Osages who had come to visit the « Chief of the White warriors, their first father ». In order to pay the expenses of the voyage, the tribe had saved their hunting spoils for four years. And on the 21st of August, at the Château of St. Cloud, the orator of the band, Marcharthitahtoongah, harangued, as his ancestors had formerly done before Louis XIV, « the chief of the White warriors ». — « The tribe of the Osages », answered the king Charles X, « has always been faithful to France as long as their country has been under her dominion; I hope, the Osages will in like manner be the faithful allies of the United States » (1).

(1) *Six Indiens rouges de la tribu des Grands Osages arrivés du Missouri au Havre le 27 juillet.* Paris, 1827, in-8°. — M. DE VALCOURT, *Histoire de la tribu des Osages.* Paris, 1827, in-8°.

V

THE FRENCH ON THE PACIFIC COAST

If the little town of St. Malo owes its celebrity to its corsairs and its existence to the Newfoundlanders, its prosperity is due to the bold merchants who founded our commercial relations with the American coasts of the Pacific ocean. The first of our voyages to the South seas, however, had nothing pacific about it. In the seven years, from March the 10th 1687 when he entered the Straits of Magellan, until December 1st 1693 when he crossed them for the second time, the buccaneer Massertie ploughed the great ocean as a pirate from the Tierra del Fuego to the Gulf of California; he put in from time to time at the Isle of Juan Fernandez, the Galapagos, or the archipelago of Tres Marias, to repair his ships and divide up the booty, and what booty! 6 000 dollars for each petty officer.

Our navigators were then forbidden to approach the American coasts of the Pacific, and it only became possible to do so towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV, when the accession of a prince of France to the Spanish throne induced the descendants of the Pizarros and the Cortès to relax their commercial ostracism. In 1698, the Malouin Noël Danycan, sieur de Lépine, offered to the

minister Pontchartrain to pay the expenses of an expedition to the South Sea, « to the uninhabited islands lying beyond those occupied by the Spanish ». In another memoir dated May 1706, he specified that it concerned *the founding of Settlements in the Island of California.* The map of the time did in fact represent California as an Island. Pontchartrain gave his consent, « provided the Malouin took effective measures for carrying out his plan ». From the account of the buccaneers who had lived for more than twenty years on the said coasts, Danycan indeed dreamed of « gold, silver and copper mines, of emeralds, amethysts and other precious stones, and even of animals with exquisite fur (1) ».

From this resulted the exploration of the Falklands, then called the *Malouine Isles*, and the group of Sea Lion Islands, which were known as the *Danycan Isles;* then followed the exploration of the Straits of Magellan, where the Breton sailors undertook a special study of ichthyology, as beautiful coloured plates bear witness; thence the discovery on April 3rd 1710, of *Passion Island,* now Clipperton Island, which Mexico contests with us. Some of our ships, the *Saint-Antoine* of Port-Louis, and *La Princesse* of Dunkirk, even went as far as Lower California but without leaving any settlements.

In the wake of the Malouins, came one of our greatest navigators, the aide de camp of the marquis de Montcalm

(1) An important work has just been devoted to the study of *Commercial and Maritime relations between France and the Coasts of the Pacific Ocean,* by N. S. W. Dahlgren, head librarian of the Royal Library of Stockholm. Paris, Champion, 1909, in-8°, t. I.

in Canada, the Commodore of the Squadron of the count de Grasse during the War of Independance. I refer to Bougainville. This son of a Paris notary had realised the importance of the American and South Sea Island Archipelagoes. He founded a colony in the Malouines whence he was driven out by the spanish claim in 1766; he reconnoitred the Pomotou Isles, resided in 1768 at Tahiti and described his delightful stay there, long before the days of Pierre Loti; he discovered the Navigators Islands, sailed along the coast of the New Hebrides which he called the *Grandes Cyclades,* doubled *Louisiade*, put in at *Port-Praslin,* gave his name to one of the Solomon Isles; then from Bourou one of the Moluccas, he returned to St. Malo on March 14th 1769, having sailed round the world.

His successor, Jean-François de Galaup, count de La Pérouse, had also begun his career in North America; where he had attracted notice during the War of Independance; he had fought bravely in the fleet of the count d'Estaing, and afterwards attacked and destroyed the settlements of the Hudson Bay Company. His mission in 1785 was to explore carefully the coasts still but little known of West America and Tartary, the seas of China, Japan and Australia, with a view to creating new openings for commerce. On the 23rd of June 1786, his frigates had reached latitude 58° on the Western coasts of North America. He gave name of *Port des Français* to the bay he entered, and christened the neighbouring islet *Ile du Cénotaphe,* a name it has kept. From there he went on to Macao, and hence to the Philippines and Japan; he explored the straits between the Yeso and the Saghalien isles, which are still called *the*

Straits of Perouse. Then he steered South. From Botany Bay, the 7th of February 1788, he again addressed a report to the Admiralty. It was his last. His end in the Oceanic Archipelago remained for a long time a mystery.

For forty years a number of our navigators strove to penetrate this mystery, crossing and recrossing again and again their own tracks in this fifth region of the world. Bruni d'Entrecasteaux, Baudin, de Saulces de Freycinet, Duperrey, Dumont d'Urville all proved themselves in the exploration of Oceania, worthy followers of the English explorers. It was one of the latter, however, who came upon the first traces of the tragic end of La Pérouse. The English captain Dillon, in 1827, was surprised to find the guard and hilt of a sword in the possession of a lascar of the Island of Ticopia. According to tradition, these articles had come from two large ships that had been wrecked, their crews having perished fighting with the natives of an island near by. The truth flashed upon Dillon; the sword-hilt bore the initials of La Pérouse. And in February 1828, Dumont d'Urville cleared up the painful mystery by discovering, in the waters which dash against the reefs of Vanikoro, bits of wreckage of his predecessors frigates, the *Boussole* and the *Astrolabe*.

If I have insisted somewhat on the voyage of La Pérouse, it is because his aim was to create a regular system of exchange between France and the American coast of the Pacific. Setting out from Marseilles on the 14th of December 1790, the *Solide* followed the American coast up to Alaska, as far as Sitka Sound where it came to fetch a load of bear, beaver and seal skins to exchange them in

China for rich cargoes of silks and porcelain. The *Solide* which was going to sail round the world was flying the tri-coloured flag; and « I congratulated myself, wrote captain Marchand, upon being the first navigator to cause this standard, the symbol of liberty, to wave on the Pacific Ocean ». In consequence, he rechristened the Marquises Isles the *Iles de la Révolution* and consecrated the memory of his act by a copper plate nailed to a large tree. Three sealed bottles, entrusted to the care of natives of different ages, contained the duplicates of the inscription engraved on the copper (1).

(1) J. Vivielle, *le Voyage du vaisseau* « le Solide » *autour du monde (an unknown page of the life of Infernet).* With the reproduction of the general map prepared under direction of M. de Fleurieu. Paris, Chapelot, 1913, in-8°.

VI

THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Whatever its origin, whether the strivings for liberty or the straitened economic conditions, the *War of Independence* bound closely together the Americans and the French, bringing into touch with one another a number of superior men animated with the noblest sentiments. Among others, a youth, who had left his own country in order to join the ranks of the insurgents, astonished the members of Congress by his zeal for the cause of liberty, when he offered himself during the summer of 1777, under the name of the marquis de La Fayette (1). From the very first meeting, he struck up a friendship with a general, « whose dignity of face and person it was impossible to pass unnoticed and who was no less distinguished in his kindly and noble manner ». In this portrait you will recognise George Washington. La Fayette rendered the same justice to lord Cornwallis, whom he was to fight : « One of the most highly esteemed characters the world hah ever seen ».

To the American delegates who had come to Versailles,

(1) Charlemagne TOWER, the ambassador of the United States of America in Russia, *le Marquis de La Fayette et la révolution d'Amérique,* translated from the English by Mme Gaston Paris. Paris, Plon, 1902. 2 vol. in-8°.

the court had lent a discreet cooperation before openly taking sides. But public opinion was formed. Benjamin Franklin, « Bonhomme Franklin », was enthusiastically welcomed by a crowd inflamed with the ideas of liberty. The cause he defended was won. On the 15th of April 1778, a minister accredited to the American congress left Toulon in the Squadron of the count d'Estaing.

For a long time, the proverbial efficiency of the English Navy delayed the final decision of the war, in spite of the bravery of the insurgents. By means of successful manœuvring, Howe covered New York and Rhode Island against count d'Estaing; Rodney in the Antilles held count de Guichen in check. Even the arrival of a French army corps, on the 12th of July 1780, brought no solution. And why? The lieutenant-general of our troops, Jean-Baptiste-Donatien de Vimeur de Rochambeau, stated the reason plainly « nothing can be attained without naval supremacy (1) ». A successful move gave it to us. Count de Grasse arrived in force from the Antilles, and on the 30th of August 1781 occupied Chesapeake river; Washington and Rochambeau kept lord Cornwallis shut up in Yorktown. The English admiral Graves failed to loosen our grip. Our control of the sea rendered the issue inevitable. The garrison of Yorktown, *composed in part of German mercenaries,* capitulated on the 19th of October, and the independence of the United States was won.

(1) J.-J. Jusserand, French ambassador to the United States, *Rochambeau in America, from unpublished documents.* An address delivered before the Society of the Phi, Beta, Kappa of Harvard University. Washington, 1912, in-8°.

There is a certain work looked upon as an authority by sailors of every nation. Signed with the name of an American admiral who has just died, « *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* », estimates at its true value the help given by France to the nation she emancipated. « The insurgents », said Admiral Mahan, « had need of a fleet, for ships of war, alone are able to ensure or imperil communications, those vital streams, exercised the same influence on the course of hostilities as they do to-day. The memory of De Grasse will always be associated with great services done to America. His name, rather than that of Rochambeau, represents the material succor which France gave to the struggling life of the young republic as La Fayette's recalls the moral sympathy so opportunely extended ».

This sympathy France has always preserved. On the 18th of frimaire year XI (december 19th 1802), Napoléon Bonaparte, then first Consul, wrote : « The French Republic will neglect nothing in order to maintain order and tighten the bonds of friendship between the two republics. »

VII

THE CUTTING OF THE PANAMA CANAL

In 1848, the very year that United States obtained California from Mexico, the discovery of grains of gold on the estate of a former officer of the Swiss Guard, called Sutter, who had come to settle near Sacramento, caused a considerable stir in the world outside. The affluence of gold seekers was so great that San Francisco, which on the eve of the discovery was a village, became in four years a town of 250 000 inhabitants; so that a Frenchman, H. Du Pasquier de Dommartin thought it possible to bring about a similar exodus in the neighbouring provinces of Chihuahua and Sonora, where he had obtained the grant of vast tracts of land. It proved to be nothing but a dream.

On the other hand, Du Pasquier clearly pointed out the problem that had arisen for the United States : the necessity of creating a connecting link between their Atlantic and Pacific possessions. And he concluded in 1852 : « Three routes are open to navigation in order to avoid the long way round by Cape Horn : the Isthmus of Panama, and that of Nicaragua in the Carribbean Sea, and that of Tehuantepec in the Gulf of Mexico. Of these three routes, the last is the shortest, the easiest, and the least dange-

rous. The Isthmus of Tehuantepec has the advantage over that of Panama, in that the land is fertile and the air as salubrious as in the Isthmus of Nicaragua, while it has a further advantage no less appreciable over this last, that in a distance of a hundred and twenty five, ninety five miles are covered in the South by lagoons and grass lands, and in the North by the Coalzacoalcos, the bed of which presents a ready made canal. »

But the « Great Frenchman » Ferdinand de Lesseps did not realise the superior advantages of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec for an interoceanic route. Belonging to a family of explorers, was the nephew of a companion of La Pérouse; the last news the civilized world had received of the famous voyage had been brought from Kamtchaka, after a voyage of a year, by Jean-Baptiste-Barthélemy de Lesseps.

Ferdinand de Lesseps was constantly preoccupied with the question of shortening the length of the voyages round the world. Had he not dreamed of uniting across central Asia, from Orenburg to Peschaver, the Russian and Anglo-Indian railway system, shortly after having inaugurated — and with what splendour — the Suez Canal? This date, the 17th of November 1869, which saw the Mediterranean joined to the Red Sea by a connecting link that had fallen into disuse since the time of the Pharaohs, had marked the acme of de Lesseps glory and placed the great Frenchman in the ranks of world-wide celebrities. Not content with having severed two great continents, Ferdinand de Lesseps wished to divide a third in half. It seemed child's play to him to mingle the waters of the Pacific with those of the Atlan-

tic, by putting them immediately in contact one with the other without locks, across the Isthmus of Panama.

The « Great Frenchman » was nearly eighty. One can build at that age, but dig! Glory can but find a grave there. On the 1st of January 1880, his little daughter Ferdinande de Lesseps thrust the first spade into the spot where the canal was to be opened. A society, apparently a powerful one, « the Interoceanic Canal Company », covered the expenses of the enterprise.

But in 1886, when 200 million dollars had already been spent, Ferdinand de Lesseps realised it was impossible to build the canal on the level. A canal with locks was essential. The company had not sufficient funds to carry it out. On the 4th of February 1889, it was liquidated. The ruin of his enterprise came as a crushing blow to the old man whom public opinion held responsible for the costly failure of the undertaking.

But the nation most interested in the cutting of the canal, kept a vigilant watch and thought of turning it from an international canal into a purely American one. The treaty of 1903 with the republic of Panama furnished them with the opportunity for doing so. The United States put forward their claim as the successors of the French Company, and by them in 1914 the greatest material exploit of the XXth century was completed : by them the Gordian knot of two Continents was cut.

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